DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 373 013 SO 024 393

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TITLE Protest & Patriotism. A History of Dissent and Reform.
INSTITUTION National Museum of American History, Washington, DC.; Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 41p.
AVAILABLE FROM Smithsonian Institution, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, A & I 1163, Washington, DC 20277-2915.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Activism; Change Agents; Change Strategies; Civil Rights; *Controversial Issues (Course Content); Demonstrations (Civil); *Dissent; *Patriotism; Secondary Education; *Social Action; *Social Change; *Social History; Social Influences; Social Problems; Teaching Guides
IDENTIFIERS Environmental Movement; Populism

ABSTRACT

Written to emphasize the historical importance and continuing relevance of protest and reform in the United States, this teacher's guide offers new perspectives and approaches to the study and discussion of the populist, civil rights, and environmental movements in history and to protest in general. A timeline poster presents an overview of U.S. political protest from the early 19th century to the present. Following teaching suggestions and an introduction, each case study of the three movements contains a timeline of key events, a primary source of an individual's experience, an essay on the movement, a bibliography of works in the area, and questions for students to consider. The case studies focus on the stories of the three protest movements and emphasize the following: (1) the origin of or catalyst for change; (2) the people who created or joined the movement; (3) the tactics developed or used to effect change; (4) the responses of government and other institutions to the movement for change; (5) the short and long term achievements of the movement; and (6) the importance of protest and dissent to the U.S. political system. (CK)

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# PROTEST & PATRIOTISM

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# CONTENTS


... INTRODUCTION ..... 5

... THE POPULIST MOVEMENT ..... 9

... THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT ..... 19

... THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT ..... 31

... AMERICAN POLITICAL PROTEST TIMELINE (GATEFOLD)


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# PROTEST & PATRIOTISM

*A History of Dissent and Reform*

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Developed and produced by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Smithsonian Institution, in collaboration with the Division of Political History, National Museum of American History.

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This publication has been made possible by a generous grant from Brother International Corporation, worldwide sponsor of the 1992 Olympic Games.

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# TEACHER'S GUIDE

*Protest & Patriotism* has been written to emphasize the historical importance and continuing relevance of protest and reform in American life. It offers teachers and students new perspectives and approaches to the study and discussion of three specific protest movements in history and to protest in general.

The guide is made up of this teacher's guide, an introduction, a timeline poster, and three case studies. Each case study has a *Timeline*, a *Personal Account* (usually a primary source), an *Essay* on the subject, a *Bibliography*, and *Questions to Consider*.

The introduction offers an overview of the subject of political protest and identifies the main themes and ideas presented in the case studies. These themes are emphasized in the Teaching Suggestions.

The case studies tell the stories of three protest movements emphasizing the following:

- the origin of or catalyst for change: defining problems, issues, and precipitating events
- the people who created and joined the movements: leaders, followers, organizations; the emergence of moderate and radical positions; and class, regional, and racial alliances
- tactics developed or used to effect change
- the responses of government and other institutions to the movement for change; resistance and acceptance
- achievements of the movement, both short- and long-term
- the importance of protest and dissent to the American political system

The timeline poster presents an overview of American political protest from the early nineteenth century to the present. The timeline in each case study presents a more detailed description of key events of each movement.

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## *Teaching Suggestions*

1. Make copies of the three case studies. Organize students into groups and assign each group an essay to read for homework. Ask students to come to class prepared to discuss the following questions:

1. What was the problem or issue that started the discontent that led to protest?
2. When and where did the protest start?
3. Who were the protest leaders? What was their social status? Were they urban or rural? poor, middle-class, or affluent? What parts of the country did they live in?
4. Who did the protesters see as the people or institution they had to petition or persuade to change?
5. Who or what institution opposed change? Why?
6. What tactics did the protesters use? What helped the movement? What hindered the movement?
7. Were the protesters a cohesive group or split into factions?
8. What did the protesters achieve? What were they unable to accomplish?

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# TEACHER'S GUIDE

| | Populism | Civil Rights | Environmentalism |
|---|---|---|---|
| Origin or catalyst | | | |
| Protesters | | | |
| Tactics | | | |
| Achievements | | | |

2. In class, assemble the groups to prepare answers to the questions. Have a class discussion of the responses. Using the blackboard, write responses in the categories listed above, or add more.

Ask, if these movements are typical of American protest movements, what seems to be necessary for success? What causes failure? What happens to failed issues? Do they emerge in other forms?

3. Examine the timeline poster with the class. Ask for observations and comments on what the students see. Analyze the photographs to discern how protest and opposition are depicted. Are there categories, themes, or recurring issues in American political protest?

4. Have students read the personal accounts that open each section ("Letter from a Farm Wife," "Memoirs of the Movement," "Environmental Dangers Come Home"). What does a personal account tell about history that secondary materials like essays do not? What are the limitations of personal accounts of history? What other sources of information does a historian use?

Many people in your school and community may have participated in the civil rights and environmental movements. Have students interview people for information about these movements, first rehearsing with you or in pairs or small groups. Have students tape record or write essays based on their interviews to share in class. Based on their own experience, what do the students think are the strengths and limitations of information obtained in interviews?

5. Using the timeline poster as a reference, have students find several newspaper accounts of the same historical event. Using only these accounts, try to tell the story of what happened. Start with the same approach used in (2) above (and explained more fully in the Introduction): what precipitated the protest, who was involved, what tactics did they use, what was the outcome? Compare and contrast the same event told by different newspapers and try to account for the differences. What kind of information is reliably reported in the newspapers? What kind of information is unreliable or is left out of newspaper accounts?

6. Use newspapers to explore current issues of protest and dissent. Compare and contrast the issues and tactics with those of other protest movements. Try to predict outcomes if these movements follow the patterns of protest already discussed.

7. Have students comment or write on the importance of protest in American political life or in their own lives. Or, have them compare their point of view on protest or a specific issue with that of their parents or another adult. ★

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# INTRODUCTION

From the eighteenth-century Sons of Liberty to the twentieth-century Black Panther Party, from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Gloria Steinem, from the Populists to the American agriculture movement, and from the protestations about the War with Mexico to the youth-inspired struggles against the Vietnam War, political and social protest—the struggle to effect profound or fundamental institutional change—has been a constant in American life. While many traditionally view protest and dissent as threats to the American political system (remember phrases such as, "America—love it or leave it"), many of the changes that were wrought by these movements have altered America for the better. In many ways, protest should be revered rather than feared. Struggling to improve America by protesting and reforming its flaws is often an act of conscience and love. In this light, protest should be seen as the highest form of patriotism.

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***Every Reform was once a private thought.***

• Ralph Waldo Emerson •

***Agitate, Agitate, Agitate.***

• Frederick Douglass •

***Good men must not obey the laws too well.***

• Ralph Waldo Emerson •

★ ★ ★

Even the framers of the Constitution recognized the importance of protest as an essential element of patriotism and effective government. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson warned that when government no longer meets the needs of the people, "it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government." Protest, in an American context, often stimulates limited change or reform. Rarely does revolutionary fervor grow significantly to restructure radically or destroy the American system.

This limited nature of reform is due to several factors. First is the inherent flexibility that is built into the American political system. There are mechanisms, from the advent of universal suffrage to the process of amending the Constitution, that allow citizens to feel that the system can often be responsive to their needs and concerns. Governments that react to concerted public pressure are often altered but rarely abolished. Another factor is the pervasive belief that most citizens have in both the special nature of American life and in the ultimate perfectibility of this republic. America has always been viewed as a land of opportunity and possibility, a place where you are limited not by class, race, or place of birth but only by your own exertions. While this assertion has always been open to debate, it is clear that many see the American experience as freer, more open, and "better" than that of any other nation on earth. Thus one may tinker with but not remake the American system. Finally, revolutionary sentiment has been curtailed by this nation's history of reform, however limited. This reform impulse has led to the abolition of slavery, the extension of the vote to women, regulation of food and health concerns, the enactment of child labor laws, legal protection of the environment, and the end of the war in Vietnam, just to mention a few. This tradition of change, which was achieved through protest and struggle, has served to limit more fundamental restructuring of American beliefs and institutions. Protest has stimulated change that ultimately has helped to preserve the nation by creating the perception that our government is responsive to the needs of its citizens.

This booklet focuses on three historical case studies, the Populists—who struggled for agricultural equity and political influence in the late nineteenth century; the civil rights movement—a changing array of individuals and organizations that battled for racial equality and human dignity in the post-World War II era; and the environmental movement—a coalition initially inspired by the youth movement of the 1960s that has broad-based support in its contemporary clashes to protect the resources of this planet. These case studies seek to illuminate the historical importance and continuing relevance of protest and reform in American life as well as illustrate the variety of reform impulses and experiences.

These three rather different examples of protest and reform were chosen because each provides a different perspective on areas such as

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# INTRODUCTION

the origin or catalyst of reform, the composition of the movement, the tactics used to effect change, and the parameters of success or failure of reform and protest in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America.

## *Origins or Catalysts of Reform*

Regardless of whether, as Emerson suggests, "every reform was once a private thought" or developed out of a collaborative effort, the origins or catalysts for such a concerted effort for change vary greatly. Some reform efforts, like the Populist movement, are shaped by long-standing economic factors that are then aggravated through an occasion such as the depression of 1893. Other reforms are molded by extreme poverty or blatant injustice and are motivated into action by a marriage of climactic incident with effective leadership such as occurred during the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, where a black woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat for a white passenger on a segregated bus. Parks's decision spurred the African American community to action and encouraged Martin Luther King, Jr., to take a leading role in the civil rights movement. Still other reform efforts, like the environmental movement, were initiated by events or issues that reflect concerns that are more universal in nature and transcend the influences of a single group. Despite different origins, all manner of reform usually shares a perception that the wrong or the injustice reflects a flaw in the system and not just the shortcomings of an individual or group, and that the forces that created this problem can be confronted.

## *Composition*

Reform movements are usually composed of like-thinking individuals or organizations that agree on certain limited goals or who recognize the need to develop coalitions with groups of similar interest. Traditionally, successful reform movements are peopled and led by members of the middle class, as is the case, for example, in the environmental movement. Middle-class composition usually ensures that the reform is limited and moderate because this class of citizens has much to benefit from and to protect within the current system. Also, middle-class reformers usually have both access to capital that funds the activities of the organization and connections within the system that help their cause. Because middle-class reformers are usually perceived as moderate by those outside of the reform, it is easier for this group to develop allies and supporters. Usually, lower-class-initiated movements have been less successful in American reform. An exception was the civil rights movement. The lower-class and racial composition of this reform initially generated little

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# INTRODUCTION

support outside of radicals, youths, and the African American community. Ultimately, however, the dignity and restraint of the movement members and their effective use of the media helped to make this reform more acceptable to most Americans.

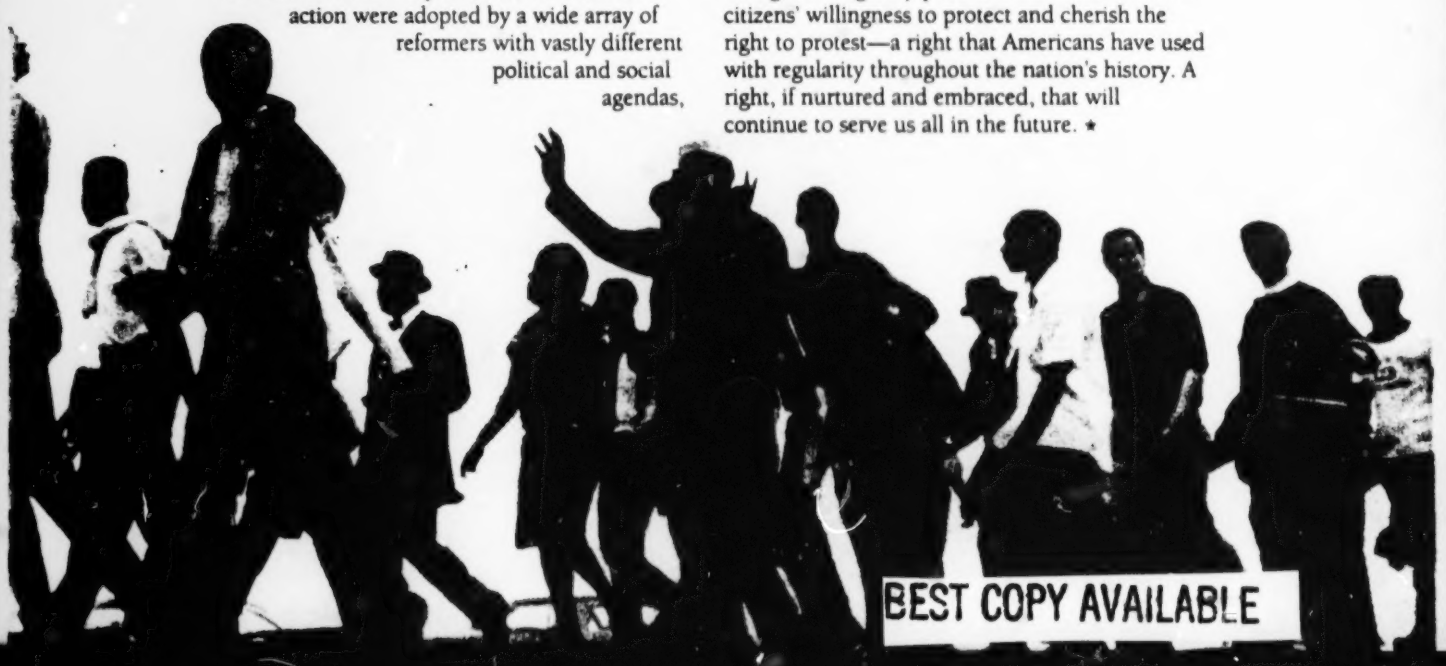
### *Tactics of Reform Movements*

Until the advent of the civil rights movement, most reformers of successful movements used methods of protest that were well within the accepted bounds of the American political and social system. Protest groups used moderate tactics such as petitions, legal options, lobbying, and other means of acceptable legislative pressure. When the Populists crafted organizations such as the Farmers Alliance or created a political party they crossed the bounds of acceptable protest—hence, their practical and concrete successes were limited. The civil rights movement broadened the mechanisms and tactics of reform by relying on a mixture of traditional means such as seeking legal redress in the courts with the extralegal measures of nonviolent direct action. This nonviolent direct action, bathed both in black Christian traditions and the passive resistance philosophy of Gandhi, included the use of boycotts, marches, and direct confrontations that would "fill all the jails." All these actions were geared to tapping the reservoir of inherent fairness and decency in the nation so that it would be moved "to fight the good fight." In addition, these extralegal activities were crafted to help the movement make its case through the court of television and print media; this ensured the movement that millions of Americans would confront the outrages in the South each evening over dinner. Ultimately these tactics of direct action were adopted by a wide array of reformers with vastly different political and social agendas, like the environmental movement and the "right-to-life" movement.

### *The Limits of Successful Reform*

There have been reforms in this nation that were successful because of charismatic leadership. There have been reforms that accomplished much due to a fortuitous set of circumstances. However, most successful reform in America can be attributed to the limited nature of its programs. The cornerstone of this success was concrete goals—like the environmental movement's plan that called for clean air legislation but that did not attempt to reform society or restructure the American political or economic system. While utopian reforms such as the Oneida Community in nineteenth-century New York had its adherents, its goals of a new social order were deemed too radical and were ultimately unsupported by most Americans. Successful reform, whether in the economic, social, or political sphere, is often measured and contained. While such reform ofttimes prevents more comprehensive or radical innovation, it slowly helps the system adapt to the ever-changing American populace and respond to the often conflicting demands of its citizens.

The American political system benefits from the activities of reformers such as Frederick Douglass whose cry of "agitate, agitate, agitate" still echoes through the nation. This system, this government, has aged well because it is not immune to change. Thomas Jefferson once wrote that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." So too is the willingness to work for and to tolerate change. America's greatest strength lies not in the changes wrought by protest and reform but in its citizens' willingness to protect and cherish the right to protest—a right that Americans have used with regularity throughout the nation's history. A right, if nurtured and embraced, that will continue to serve us all in the future. ★



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# THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

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*"Farmers need to raise less corn and more hell."*

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1867 Patrons of Husbandry, popularly known as the Grange, is founded as a farmers secret lodge focusing on social and educational activities.

1874 Eleven states in the Middle West have farmers political parties (Granger parties). They elect state officials, enact laws regulating businesses.

1876 Grange membership declines following bankruptcies of business ventures, controversial political activities.

1876-84 Greenback Party replaces the Grange as voice of farmers.

1878 Greenback Party elects fourteen congressmen.

1887 Union Labor Party, seen as successor to Greenback movement, is founded. Agenda includes currency inflation to remedy debt, government ownership of utilities, graduated income tax, direct election of U.S. senators, women's suffrage, and equal pay for equal work.

1888 Union Labor nominee for president gets only 1 percent of nationwide vote.

Personal Accounts

## *The Crop Lien*

*The farmer, his eyes downcast, and his hat sometimes literally in his hand, approached the merchant with a list of his needs. The man behind the counter consulted a ledger, and after a mumbled exchange, moved to his shelves to select the goods that would satisfy at least a part of his customer's wants. Rarely did the farmer receive the range of items or even the quantity of one item he had requested. No money changed hands; the merchant merely made brief notations in his ledger. Two weeks or a month later, the farmer would return, the consultation would recur, the mumbled exchange and the careful selection of goods would ensue, and new additions would be noted in the ledger. From early spring to late fall the ritual would be enacted until, at "settlin'-up" time, the farmer and the merchant would meet at the local cotton gin, where the fruits of a year's toil would be ginned, bagged, tied, weighed, and sold. At that moment, the farmer would learn what his cotton had brought. The merchant, who had possessed title to the crop even before the farmer had planted it, then consulted his ledger for a final time. The accumulated debt for the year, he informed the farmer, exceeded the income received from the cotton crop. The farmer had failed in his effort to "pay out"—he still owed the merchant a remaining balance for the supplies "furnished" on credit during the year. The "furnishing merchant" would then announce his intention to carry the farmer through the winter on a new account, the latter merely having to sign a note mortgaging to the merchant the next year's crop. The lien signed, the farmer, empty-handed, climbed in his wagon and drove home, knowing that for the second or fifth or fifteenth year he had not paid out.*

(Goodwyn, 21-25)

## *Letter from a Farm Wife* (transcription)

*Mendota, Kans June 29 1894*

*Dear Governor*
*I take my Pen In hand to let you know that we are Starving to death. It is Pretty hard to do without any thing to Eat hear in this God for saken country[.] [W]e would of had Plenty to Eat if the hail hadent cut our rye down and ruined our corn and Potatoes[.] I had the Prettiest Garden that you Ever seen and the hail ruined It and I have nothing to look at[.] My Husband went a way to find work and came home last night and told me that we would have to Starve[.] He has bin in ten countys and did not Get no work[.] It is Pretty hard for a woman to do with out any thing to Eat when She doesent no what minute She will be confined to bed[.] If I was In Iowa I would be all right[.] I was born there and raised there[ ] I havent had nothing to Eat to day and It is three o clock[.]*

*well I will close rite Soon*
*From Mrs. Susan Orcutt*

A letter to Kansas Governor Lewelling
Kansas State Historical Society

**1880-90** Farmers Alliance (three organizations, one in North and two in South, for whites and blacks), similar to the Grange, rises in agricultural areas.

**1890** Farmers raise bumper crops, but prices for agricultural products are half of what they had been in 1865.

**1890** Sponsored by state Alliances, People's parties emerge in Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Colorado, Michigan, and Indiana.

**1892** National People's Party is formed and nominates James B. Weaver for president. Platform demands government activism, greater popular participation in government decision making, and direct election of president, vice president, and senators. Weaver wins 9 percent of vote.

**1893** Economic depression occurs. Currency issues dominate national debates.

**1896** Democrats persuade Populists to support William Jennings Bryan for president. Republican McKinley wins election, signaling dominance of urban, industrial interests.

**1904** Populist presidential candidate Tom Watson receives less than 1 percent of vote.

• • •

*Norton County Kansas, residence. This dugout dwelling was not what people pictured when they imagined the peaceful, rural world of the farm family.*

Kansas State Historical Society

## *Farmers as an Emerging Force*

The agrarian movement that began after the Civil War and culminated in the Populist Party did not become powerful enough to capture the presidency or set national policy. Nevertheless, it did gain enough strength to win many local elections, participate in the public debate, become a major third party, and influence the presidential elections of 1892 and 1896. While these farmers reaped limited direct benefits from their protests, their actions influenced and stimulated political change that ultimately led, in part, to more active and responsive federal and state governments. These were remarkable achievements for a movement comprised of farmers—and predominantly the poorest of farmers. Reeling from the problems caused by the country's rapid growth, increased farm productivity, and unregulated monetary and credit systems, farmers fought back with the power of organized activity—first in educational and social organizations, then in cooperatives, and finally in a political party.

The farmers' major problems stemmed from their dependence on credit and a decline in crop revenues that resulted from overproduction. Farmers had free or cheap land, but they had to take loans to plant crops and buy necessities until the harvest and sale of their crop. Prices declined in the twenty-five years after the war because more land was being farmed and because of technological advances in machinery and fertilizer. Supply exceeded demand. Bigger crops each year ironically brought lower prices; the lower prices farmers received for their crops made it impossible to pay off their loans. Some were locked into the crop-lien system, which made their situation worsen, not improve, with every crop. These severe problems were added to the

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# THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

farmers' traditional dependence on the weather and the hardships and isolation of farm life.

Struggling farmers had few options. Some farmers sought limited relief by moving west, mostly to Texas, lured by the vision of open lands and fresh opportunity. But African American farmers who tried to escape debt lived under the coercive threat of white terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. For many, conditions were little better than slavery.

The dream of fresh starts in new farmlands did not solve the farmers' problems. Farmers quickly discovered that without sufficient credit, they lacked the necessary capital to establish financial independence. The problems they had fled in the cotton belt cropped up again in the West. Slowly farmers, after years of failure and frustration, created organizations of mutual support.

## *Farmers Organizations*

Among the many types of mutual aid societies popular among farmers, one of the most widespread was the Patrons of Husbandry, known as the Grange. This organization sought to circumvent the high prices of the credit merchant by establishing cash-only cooperative stores (Goodwyn, 32). Many farmers could not take advantage of this option, however, because their fundamental problem was a lack of cash. The creation of the Grange signalled the farmer's understanding that a changing American economic and political scene demanded new and innovative responses.

### Farmers Alliance

★ The first organization to offer a practical alternative for struggling farm families was the Farmers Alliance in Texas. The Alliance began as one of scores of farmers organizations of the 1870s and 1880s, a time in which farmers and ranchers were often in conflict over frontier lands. In its early years, the Alliance was a social organization that had secrets and rites like the fraternal orders popular at the time.

The Alliance would perhaps have never made a lasting impact had it not been for the compelling creativity and vision of S. O. Daws, who revitalized the faltering Alliance in 1884-85 as its first "traveling lecturer." Daws helped convince farmers that their problems were rooted in the credit and marketing system of the cotton belt (McMath, 18). This was new to farmers accustomed to Southern newspapers' insistence that farmers "bought too much and sold too little" (Goodwyn, 24, 26-27).

★★★

*Gathering buffalo chips on the prairie near Lakin, Kansas, 1893.*

Kansas State Historical Society

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# THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

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*Engraving in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, August 30, 1873, showing a meeting of the Grange, a farmers organization.*

Library of Congress

Daws proposed a countermonopolistic strategy as a solution. Farmers in the Alliance would trade exclusively with one merchant. In exchange for the proceeds from their cotton crop, the merchant would provide the necessary farm tools and other supplies directly to the Alliance instead of through a middleman. There was considerable opposition from retailers, and many merchants refused to deal with the Alliance except through intermediaries.

The Alliance persisted nonetheless and gradually established local sub-Alliances as farmers joined forces using their crops as a bargaining chip. In 1885 they voted to sell collectively through mass cotton sales, a practice known as "bulking." Because of convenience to buyers, especially from foreign countries, they were able to charge higher prices.

The tangible results of the Alliance program attracted hundreds of farmers to the organization's ranks. New members were recruited through the traveling lecturers, who focused as much on educating farmers about the credit and banking system, or offering technological or scientific information, as on "selling" the Alliance. In fact, once farmers began to understand the machinations of the financial system, they required little convincing. The Alliance was emerging as an important economic actor in the South.

The farmers in the Alliance began to see that their obstacles lay in the control of economic policy by people who were acting in the interest of big business. They felt that the difficulty of getting credit, the tight money supply, and the falling prices were being controlled by Northern bankers and politicians. As their analysis broadened, farmers began to recognize common grievances being expressed by other types of workers.



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# THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

*In his presidential bid in 1896, William Jennings Bryan took his campaign to the people. While his opponent greeted crowds from his front porch, Bryan traveled constantly, making over six hundred speeches and reaching an estimated five million people. A powerful speaker, Bryan might have won in the age of radio and television.*

Library of Congress

In 1886, the Alliance's new chief organizer was a thirty-six-year-old farmer named William Lamb. He had been introduced to the organization by S. O. Daws but soon became its innovative leader. Lamb led the organization to support the Missouri-Pacific Line railroad strike led by the Knights of Labor. Their rationale was that the railroad workers, like the farmers, were being exploited by big money interests. The Alliance's material support enabled the Knights to prolong the strike, but magnate Jay Gould hired strikebreakers. Within months, the strike was broken, the union crushed, and the leaders jailed.

Although a few agrarian reformers became true radicals, envisioning farmers and workers united to bring down big business, the two groups ultimately pursued their separate goals. The strike experience, however, led the Alliance to a new emphasis toward electoral politics. The groups' convention of August 1886 reflected an increasingly radical and politically sophisticated set of demands, including endorsement of a flexible money supply (Greenbacks) to counteract the effects of constricted gold-based supply.

**Colored Farmers National Alliance and Cooperative Union**

★ A major sector of the farming population only tangentially touched by formal Alliance activism was that comprised of African American farmers. The Texas Alliance voted in 1882 to restrict membership to whites, because members viewed their affiliation as a social organization "where we meet with our wives and daughters" (McMath, 15). During the Populist campaigns of the 1890s, African American participation was endorsed, but in the Farmers Alliance of the 1880s, little effort was made to include blacks. White Alliancemen brought their families to mass rallies and meetings in ribbon-bedecked buggies, amid waving banners and flags. African American farmers could not possibly present such an open challenge to the power structure of the white supremacist South, particularly when the people they challenged controlled the judicial, penal, and police systems. Moreover, lynch law superseded all legal political processes. A meeting of black farmers in 1886 nevertheless laid the foundation for the Colored Farmers National Alliance and Cooperative Union. Cautiously operating under the aegis of white spokesmen, the Colored Alliance eventually grew to an estimated quarter million members (Goodwyn, 118-23). Excluded from many organizations because of race, African Americans often formed parallel institutions such as the Colored Alliance. This practice not only provided immediate benefits for group members, but also contributed to the stability and autonomy of the African American community during the years of legalized segregation.

### *Expansion into Economic Influence*

With the success of the bulking system and the growth of the organization, Alliance leaders devised more ambitious plans. Dr. Charles W. Macune provided the intellectual leadership. Arguing that local or even state collective enterprise was not sufficient, Macune outlined a secret organization of all cotton

• • •
*Butchering hogs, in rural Virginia, ca. 1899.*
Library of Congress

growers for the express purpose of breaking the power of monopoly—creating, in essence, a farmers' monopoly (Hicks, 134). An Exchange based in Dallas was to serve as the central marketing and sales agent and also as a discount purchaser of farm implements for Alliance members. Acting collectively, farmers would be able to demand fair prices for their crops and to obtain discounts as bulk purchasers. The plan would have circumvented both creditors and retailers.

Ideally, the Exchange would have been started with capital collected from members, but most farmers still lacked cash and required credit to finance their annual crop. The Alliance arranged joint notes for each local sub-Alliance, co-signed by property owners. When these notes were brought to the banks as collateral for loans, they were refused. Macune and other Alliance spokesmen charged collusion and interference from competing economic interests. Without initial cash capital, the Texas Exchange could not purchase the supplies needed to raise the cotton crop. Despite its efforts to survive, the Alliance closed the Texas Exchange after twenty months (Hicks, 134-37).

The experiences of the Farmers Alliance led many members to believe that their real problem lay in the fact that laws and customary practices favored banks and big businesses over ordinary small farmers. They became convinced of this in 1889 when their political representatives refused to support a proposal for government assistance to farmers. The Alliance had wanted the government to store farmers' crops to await higher prices before selling, and to pay them up to 80 percent of the market value in advance. In exchange, participating farmers would pay interest and fees for grading, storage, and insurance. All they needed but did not obtain was the support of their representatives in Congress to sponsor and enact the necessary legislation, which they called the "subtreasury plan."

### *Taking the Political Route*

Political parties were still influenced by the regional lines of the Civil War. The Republicans were the party of the North, influenced heavily by the Northeastern banking community. Most white Southerners belonged to the Democratic Party; after the war, the party became the symbol of white supremacy, states' rights, and the "lost" culture of the South. Northern Alliancemen who could not see their own needs met by either the Democratic or the Republican party were willing to consider third-party activity. But Southern Alliancemen wanted to stay members of the Democratic Party, partly because abandoning it meant undermining white supremacy. Although the Democrats courted the farmers' support, ultimately, in 1890-91 Alliance affiliates around the country decided to form a true "people's party," the Populist Party.

The emergence of a major third party showed both Republicans and Democrats that they could not ignore the Populists. Many Populist

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# THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

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*The political commentator who drew this cartoon recognized that William Jennings Bryan's presidential bid was based on uneasy compromises.*

Library of Congress

candidates campaigned in local elections, yet beyond the agricultural belt farmers found it difficult to win the support of the ethnically diverse urban workers, necessary if they were to build a national coalition. Democratic and Republican party members in agricultural districts found they needed farmers' votes to stay in office. Inevitably, the Democrats and Populists sought each other out.

The Democrats offered the advantage of national organization and the promise of incorporating Populist demands on their party platform. The Populists were skeptical of true Democratic support but felt pressured to agree on an allegiance in the hopes of endorsement of their programs once the Democrats came to power. As election time neared, Democrats insisted that farmers' concerns would not have broad enough appeal for a national campaign.

An important force in shaping the Populists' connection with the Democratic Party was a major economic depression in 1893. In trying to understand why the country had entered a depression, people turned to two ideas that had been circulating since 1873: that protective tariffs and the money supply were the causes of economic woes.

Part of the credit problem attacked by the Alliance was the fact that the government kept the only official money, gold, in short supply. They advocated circulating more money, either "greenback" bills or silver. This would cause some inflation, but higher prices for crops would enable farmers to get out of debt. The Democrats encouraged the Populists to jointly support "free silver" as a campaign strategy, seeing this as a broad enough issue for national support.

Financed heavily by Western silver mine owners, the "free silver" movement swept the country as an answer to the country's deepening financial troubles. Positioned against the Republican "goldbugs," the silverites claimed they stood for the interests of the people and not big business. But as the silver issue began to dominate national debates, many Alliance members became worried that their real concerns were disappearing amid the rhetoric, as the Democrats whittled away at the full Populist platform. The Democrats chose the electrifying speaker William Jennings Bryan to run against McKinley in the presidential elections of 1896 and pressured the Populists to endorse Bryan as their own candidate as well.

After an intense and emotional campaign season, the Democratic-Populist ticket lost the presidency, despite a good showing in Southern local elections. By fusing with the Democrats, the Populists soon lost their autonomy. By 1898 the Populists had virtually disappeared as a political force.

But the election had been hotly contested: nearly fourteen million voters created the largest turnout in American history. Republican McKinley had had the financial support of big business—and millions more in campaign funds than Bryan. McKinley's victory came largely from his success in the industrialized Northeast and the support of businessmen, workers, and prosperous farmers. His victory symbolically demonstrated the emergence of an urban, industrial society and the decline of a rural, agricultural one (Cherny).

## *Lessons of the Populist Experience*

The poor farmers could not gain the support of a large enough segment of the American population to prevail. Yet they had, in just three tumultuous decades, challenged the shape and structure of the American economy. Their political transformation began with the simple desire to live a life to which they believed they were entitled. Hundreds of farm families in the South and West clung to the common American wisdom that hard honest work, "the sweat of one's brow," would at the very least save them from the grip of debt, peonage, and foreclosures sweeping the farm belt. Yet, no matter how hard they worked, many faced financial ruin; in response, they sought to make the government more attentive to their needs.

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# THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

The Populist experience also highlights the processes by which the American financial elite defused a potentially explosive movement. Realizing that the Populists represented significant electoral strength, both Democrats and Republicans attempted to incorporate enough of the Populist ideology into their political platforms to satisfy the Populists without alienating their regular membership. Both parties suffered deep splits over the silver issue, but the Democrats co-opted the Populist cause in the presidential campaign of 1896.

In some respects, the Populists were successful in implementing their policy initiatives. They gained a sense of identity and common cause by organizing. They raised concerns about the growing influence of large corporations in American economic and political life and the injustices in the economic system. They also recognized the need to force the federal government to intercede more actively in improving the lives of its citizens. The concerns first raised by the Populists were soon trumpeted in the Progressive reforms of the pre-World War I era. ★

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## *Questions to Consider*

1. Did the Populists realistically respond to the root causes of their problems or did they create and attack scapegoats?

2. How did the Populists respond to a changing America that was shaped by immigration, industrialization, and other factors beyond their control?

3. To what extent were the farmers responsible for the economic crises of the late nineteenth century? What other factors, if any, shaped the economic possibilities of these farmers?

4. Despite the efforts of the Populist movement, farmers have suffered economically and politically. Based on other reading, compare the life of farmers in the late nineteenth century to that of farmers in the late twentieth century. Explain the American agricultural movement of the late 1970s.

5. Read the first chapter of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*. How does this presentation counter traditional images of the farmer?

# THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

*We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.*



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1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Kansas) Supreme Court decision ends legal racial segregation in public schools

1955 Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till of Chicago is mutilated and murdered in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Case receives wide coverage in black media.

Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus to a white man and is arrested. Montgomery bus boycott to desegregate public buses begins, leading to the creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ralph David Abernathy.

1957 Nine black students desegregate Little Rock, Arkansas, Central High School under military protection.

1960 Four North Carolina A&T students stage sit-in at Woolworth's segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, setting off wave of sit-ins across the South.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) founded in April by SCLC in response to student movement, quickly becomes independent.

1961 "Freedom Rides" to desegregate interstate buses and restaurants during summer meet with violence in the South.

1962 James Meredith enrolled at Ole Miss under federal troop patrol.

Personal Accounts

## *Memoirs of the Movement*

*I grew up in Martinsville, Virginia, and that's a small town of about 35,000 people in the Shenandoah Valley. Very beautiful area. My parents are still living there. Graduated high school there in fifty-eight. And discussing the segregated South, I often talk with my friends and how it affected us at the time. I know when I was in high school, even when I was in elementary school, I noticed that in our books—it didn't bother me, because I didn't know any better, you know—I noticed that our books always read "Martinsville High School," and, of course, our high school was Albert Harris High School, it wasn't the same school. In fact, the white high school was Martinsville High School.*

*And then in high school, we had a band since I was about seventh grade, and we wore white shirts and black pants. When we were in parades that involved a city—you know, Thanksgiving, any other type of parade that the city had, they involved the school and after a while we felt very—"Why don't we have uniforms like Martinsville High School?" They had fabulous uniforms, and their majorettes had uniforms, and it seems like every time we were going to be in a city parade, being on display, you know, we had to conjure up something different for the majorettes to wear. . . .*

*So there was this particular parade, and we had a new band director, that's what it was, a new band director. And he was very young, I guess just out of college, and he didn't like the idea. . . . "We're not going to be in a parade if we can't have uniforms." . . . So when we got our new uniforms, the band was so excited. It read, stamped in the back, "Martinsville High School." We were very happy that we had gotten new uniforms, but our colors were burgundy and white, and Martinsville High School, their colors were burgundy and gold. But still, we had a uniform! You know what I'm saying? So when I think about my days before the signing of the legislation and everything, those bills or whatever, how I did think about it, but didn't know why, or didn't think that things should be different. Yeah, it was just a way of life.*

*So, going to Hampton [university] in 1958—we didn't do this my freshman year, I think it started in fifty-nine. So fifty-nine . . .and the student government's getting us together, and we're talking about doing the sit-ins in Hampton and Newport News, Virginia. . . . As I recall, a lot of the students were very frightened to do that, because at that time we started reading in the newspapers about how the policemen were there, and the dogs, and the fire hydrants, and all of that. I know that was my feeling. "Are we really going to do this?" . . . At that time I'd been there a year, so we had gone downtown, and if you wanted a drink from this particular drugstore . . .you had to go—they had carry-out places for you to go—and you had to stand at the edge of the counter near the door and order a soda. So that's where I used to do the sit-ins. . . .You go in, and once they said, "We don't serve you. Leave," you know, I was never the type of person to say anything back, I just got up and left, because I was afraid of, you know, being put in jail. I was raised with the idea that you don't go to jail, so I didn't know how that would affect me.*

*. . .We always went in groups. They told us not to go alone . . .we went into Newport News, Virginia—had to ride a bus. They brought buses onto campus that would take us into the town of Newport News, and a number of us, our parents had gotten us charge accounts at this particular store in Newport News . . . but they had a tea room upstairs that we couldn't go . . . to . . . —I said, "I want to integrate this place," and we had gone upstairs this particular day to the tea room, and they had said they wouldn't serve us. . . .*

*We were leaving. See, after so many times, if the*

1963 Martin Luther King delivers "I Have a Dream" speech at August 28 March on Washington, more than 250,000 people gather at the Lincoln Memorial

Four black girls are killed in bombing of their church in Birmingham, Alabama, as they put on their choir robes

President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas in November

1964 Congress passes Civil Rights Act

SNCC creates the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party under nonexclusionary policy to challenge illegal discrimination by the regular Democratic Party

Mississippi Summer Project ("Freedom Summer") massive voter-registration drive, is marked by dozens of murders and bombings

1965 Malcom X is assassinated in February in New York City

Selma to Montgomery march in Alabama to support passage of the Voting Rights Act

1966 Stokely Carmichael publicizes phrase "Black Power" during Meredith march in June

1968 Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated in April in Memphis. Riots erupt in cities across the nation.

Senator Robert F. Kennedy, former Attorney General and presidential candidate, is assassinated in Los Angeles

Congress passes Fair Housing Act

1972 Congress passes Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEO)

*waitress or whomever said, "We don't serve you. Would you leave?" or whatever she'd say—maybe they would say that two or three times to you and then you'd see that you were not going to be served, so you would leave.*

*. . . So as we were standing outside, that's when they did the fire hydrant and the hose, and that was the most devastating experience. That was the first time I had seen that, even though you'd read in the newspapers, it had never happened to me and never happened to anybody that I knew.*

*It made you very angry. It made you very angry and questioning why, why, why is this happening? Then you'd think about your poor parents or you had an uncle or a cousin or a brother who was in the service and serving the country, but yet you didn't have equal rights in the country too—so why would they have them fighting for the country if we couldn't have equal rights that way? . . . It was also very motivating. "I'm gonna do this," and "I'm gonna do that," and you're going to continue school, you're going to get as much education as you're going to get, nobody's going to hold me down, and we're going to go to the end with this. So that's when I saw, that's when my head changed about it, and I think it did for a lot of other people, a lot of other kids my age.*

Excerpt from interview with Jacky Bolden, August 15, 1985. Joan and Robert Morrison Collection, National Museum of American History

## *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*

During the 1950s and 1960s, a loose coalition of blacks and whites, the middle and the lower classes, laborers and professionals, individuals and organizations effected profound racial change in America. While this civil rights movement for equal rights for all citizens began in earnest in the twentieth century, its roots lay in the struggles of Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W. E. B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, and millions of other less famous African Americans, both slave and free. Landmark Supreme Court decisions in the 1950s gave African Americans new legal standing, and the movement set out to change equality under law into equality in the daily lives of millions of oppressed people. Although the movement was organized by the black middle class, it was the laborers, the mothers, the students, schoolteachers, and domestics who worked together in protest to initiate change. Effected largely through peaceful resistance, the movement would extend to all segments of society. The initial protest was about laws, but it grew to include economics and, ultimately, attitudes.

During the years that immediately followed the Civil War, Congress adopted the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. These amendments for the first time in the history of the United States guaranteed blacks freedom, citizenship, and suffrage. These acts, which would fall into disuse during the late nineteenth century, ultimately provided the legal foundation for the changes sparked by the civil rights movement. For a brief period after the war until the withdrawal of Union troops from the South in 1877, blacks exercised their right to vote, and many held federal and state offices. Yet, because most blacks were released from slavery without land compensation or adequate resources, they were economically dependent, especially in the South.

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# THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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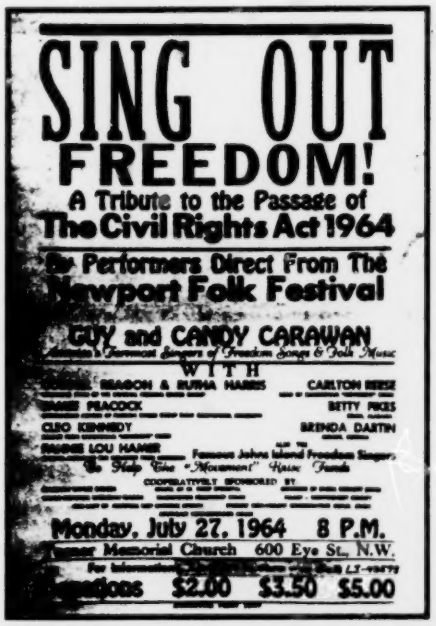
*Civil rights organizations joined forces with church groups to raise money for the cause.*

National Museum of American History

African Americans struggled to obtain education and employment. Many became tenant farmers, indebted to owners for use of the land, seed, and tools. Southern whites, devastated by the war, were openly hostile to African Americans. Access to public facilities like schools, theaters, and restaurants was restricted, segregated, or denied. Most Southern blacks faced constant bigotry, open hostility, and blatant discrimination. Terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia represented the worst extremes of fear and hatred.




In the North, racism manifested itself in different, sometimes less obvious ways than in the South, but discrimination prevailed. Buses, restaurants, and jobs were not explicitly segregated by law, but by custom, beaches, dance halls, and social service facilities were all separated by race. Restricted residential patterns led to predominantly black or white neighborhoods, businesses, and schools. And black workers, whose opportunities were limited by race, were hired last, fired first, and passed over for promotions.

Since its inception in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began cautiously to try out marches, court cases, and boycotts that challenged the prevailing racial customs and laws. After both world wars, black soldiers returned to the United States and found that after fighting for democracy in Europe, they also had to battle for democracy in America. Thus, by 1950, this history of struggle culminated in an era of great expectation, a time that forever changed race relations in this country, a period of turmoil, violence, victories, and defeats—the era of the civil rights movement in America.

With the lawsuit *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (May 17, 1954), the Supreme Court unanimously ruled against the "separate but equal" laws that kept America's schools and ultimately the nation segregated. Only a year later, Rosa Parks, buoyed by the recent Court decision and motivated by fatigue and anger, tested the Alabama segregation laws by refusing to give up her seat to a white person on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus. Parks was arrested. The black community of Montgomery rallied in support of Mrs. Parks behind a church-dominated leadership led by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blacks boycotted the bus system. For a year blacks walked or carpooled and suffered false arrests, fines, cancellation of insurance on cars being used instead of buses, firebombings, and KKK marches. They refused to end the boycott until the law that enforced segregation was repealed. In 1956, the Supreme Court ordered Montgomery's buses desegregated. The civil rights movement had its first victory.

## *Principal Organizations*

Organizations became the driving force in giving direction to the movement and articulating the concerns of African Americans in the legal and political arenas. Of the many civil rights organizations active during the 1950s and 1960s, the most influential were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

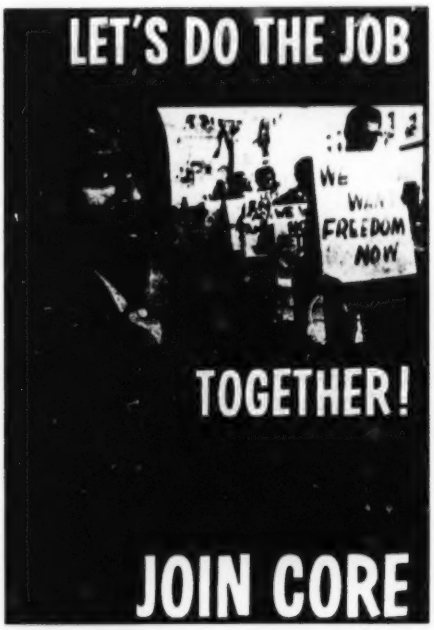
**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**

★ The NAACP, the oldest of these organizations, was founded in 1909 by a group of white social activists and one African American, W. E. B. DuBois. The group's early activities focused on anti-lynching legislation and political protests. By the 1950s, it had a broad network of local chapters and was the best-known of the civil rights groups. NAACP was regarded by many African Americans as conservative, because of its efforts to maintain amicable relations with legislators and other influential Americans, the organization was reluctant to support activities that went outside the accepted methods of protest such as legal petitioning and legislative lobbying.



22

Yet the NAACP often stepped to the forefront as the representative of African American views once the efforts of civil rights activists brought national attention to the issues of lynching, segregation, and voting rights.

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*This poster emphasizes CORE's interracial membership. What other messages about the movement does it convey?*
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**Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)**

★ CORE, founded in 1942, was the first group to introduce Gandhian principles of nonviolence into African American tactics of resistance. An interracial organization from Chicago, CORE had spread into the South by 1954. As the movement progressed, CORE became involved with grassroots organizing for voter registration, particularly in Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina. The organization had highly visible, charismatic leaders like James Farmer and later Floyd McKissick, but it allowed enough autonomy at the local level to develop leadership skills in all chapters.

**Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**

★ The SCLC was born during the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56. It originally was an umbrella organization consisting of the heads of local churches and activists from such groups as the NAACP. Martin Luther King, Jr., became the first president, assisted by Ralph David Abernathy and young recruits like Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson. Unlike the older groups, SCLC membership was overwhelmingly black and drew heavily on the traditions and culture of the churches from which it originated. Largely due to Martin Luther King's growing national stature, SCLC quickly amassed a huge following and substantial funds. This support enabled SCLC to pursue the political and legislative agenda on a national level, gaining access to influential politicians to lobby on behalf of legislation such as the Voting Rights and Civil Rights acts.

**Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**

★ Many black and white students had joined the movement, and the older organizations rushed to harness and direct their energy. In 1960 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was created by the SCLC to be a youth wing, but it quickly became autonomous. It never became prominent in negotiations with the national political establishment, but SNCC was perhaps the most ambitious and active grassroots mobilizing organization in the movement. Though led by Southern black students, membership included many Northern white sympathizers who participated in summer voter-registration campaigns, activities that were essential to the success of the movement but were also quite dangerous for the members of SNCC.

The movement included people of different class, racial, and geographic backgrounds. People also differed in terms of political perspectives and appropriate strategy. One of the striking features of the movement was that ordinary people who had never participated in formal political organizations were often moved to join these organizations, with little prompting. A student participant in the movement commented that "the civil rights movement was led by leaders who did their best to keep up with the people." Students, mothers, sharecroppers—ordinary folks—gathered at their community churches and schools in mass meetings. They transformed hymns and spirituals into "freedom songs" of struggle, such as "We Shall Overcome," which became the national anthem of the movement. This stirring theme was sung to close each meeting as members stood, arms crossed and hands clasped; it has since become the rallying call for protest movements of every kind.

## *Tactics*

Five of the major tactics used during the era of nonviolent protest were boycotts, sit-ins, Freedom Rides, marches, and voter registration. Although some of these tactics had been used by other protesting groups, they were particularly effective in the civil rights movement, in part because media coverage brought them to national attention.


23

*The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee believed in confrontation and activism. Why would they choose this image for a poster?*

National Museum of American History

**Boycotts**

★ The Montgomery, Alabama, boycott following the arrest of Rosa Parks was nonviolent but effective. The boycott lasted a year and came close to being crushed by the city of Montgomery's obtaining a county court order to end black carpools. Earlier that same day, however, the Supreme Court voided Montgomery law to segregate buses. The boycott drew national media attention not only to Montgomery and to Dr. King, but to the beginnings of the movement as well. Boycotts represented a major tool of the movement in the South for the next ten years. In cities from Selma, Alabama, to Albany, Georgia, to Little Rock, Arkansas, boycotts of businesses that refused to hire black workers or that mistreated their black clientele helped to change the economic landscape of the South.

**Sit-ins**

★ In 1961, four students from North Carolina A&T University refused to leave the lunch counter in the Greensboro Woolworth's until they were served. In many Southern eateries, blacks were unable to sit at lunch counters or eat in dining



24

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THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

rooms; they were expected to eat standing in the "colored corner" or take their meals outside. Rather than accept the humiliation of segregated eating, the sit-in was developed, attracted national media publicity, and spread across the South as a movement strategy, in part because it was essentially an active yet nonviolent posture.

**Freedom Rides**

★ As the initial enthusiasm for sit-ins began to wane, SNCC activists joined with CORE in an experiment of a new tactic, the "Freedom Ride." On May 1, 1961, an integrated group embarked on a trip from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans on two separate buses to desegregate buses and terminals along the way. In Alabama, one bus was burned and the other was attacked by a mob. Many participants were seriously injured and decided to abandon the trip. Martin Luther King, Jr., president of the SCLC, called for a halt to the ride under pressure from Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Yet, ignoring the warnings, students mobilized by SNCC poured into Alabama to continue the Ride through Mississippi. Throughout the summer of 1961, the Freedom Rides continued with the participation of Southern students and many Northern white supporters. These efforts ultimately succeeded in forcing the desegregation of interstate transportation facilities.

**Marches**

★ Another major tactic of the movement was the use of marches as a means to protest segregation and discrimination. These marches, which occurred from Selma to Montgomery, in Memphis, in Chicago, and in a myriad of large cities and rural hamlets, served several important purposes. First, these processions allowed the diverse leaders of CORE, SNCC, SCLC, and the NAACP to come together and participate in a concerted effort. In a way, these marches served as a unifying factor during this period. Second, because these marches required planning and advance notice, they were exceptionally suited for stimulating television and media attention. One cannot underestimate the impact of hundreds of citizens marching peacefully for equal rights, and often confronted violently or attacked with dogs and water hoses, on the millions of Americans who watched or read about these marches each day. Third, the marches were also an opportunity for the average citizen to participate in this struggle. For many blacks, the marches were both sources of pride and the vehicle through which they could demonstrate their desire to see profound political and social change occur.

The most successful of these marches was the March on Washington in 1963. This march, sponsored by a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, and labor organizations, was the implementation of an idea conceived by A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the black union, "The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Maids and Porters," in 1941. As thousands of black and white Americans surrounded the Lincoln Memorial on that hot August day, a number of speeches chronicled the need for racial change and offered a variety of solutions to the problems facing America. All that passion, pain, and hope was captured by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "I Have a Dream" speech. This powerful appeal, firmly rooted in black religious traditions, moved the crowd—and the nation—to work anew for the day when people would "be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." King's speech, which was televised around the world, helped to push a timid Congress toward more aggressively pursuing legislation to ensure that civil rights would be guaranteed to all.

**Voter Registration**

★ During the organization's early days, SNCC focused on the desegregation issue, but some members stressed the importance of registering black voters. Many Southern districts had large black populations who lacked political influence, since they were prevented from voting by terrorist tactics and false representation of the law by local officials. The voter-registration effort was originally considered more conservative than "direct action" protests (the Democratic Party and the



25

federal government favored and facilitated black voter registration). SNCC scattered organizers across the South, many of them college students, in painstaking campaigns to educate African Americans in small rural communities and prepare them for the voting challenge. CORE followed a similar program focused in Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina.

The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella group of civil rights organizations in Mississippi, invited hundreds of white students to assist in the registration drive. COFO believed that any violence against them would grab the attention of the national media, which had largely ignored the black murders. While the volunteers were still in training, three young activists, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, were brutally murdered. After an arrest on a traffic charge, the sheriff had turned them over to the local Ku Klux Klan. The body of eighteen-year-old James Chaney, the black student, was found horribly mutilated. Yet the students pressed on to educate and register poor black Mississippians throughout the Freedom Summer, despite the continued violence and murders.

When COFO ran a mock election to demonstrate the voting power of African Americans if they were all registered, more than 80,000 people, four times the number officially allowed to register, cast ballots for "Freedom" candidates. The experience led SNCC to initiate a campaign to seat an alternative group of delegates to the Mississippi Democratic Party, to be known as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The MFDP delegates were to be chosen on truly democratic principles of universal enfranchisement. Strictly following established regulations, they qualified four candidates for the upcoming primary, including the charismatic Fannie Lou Hamer (whose comment, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired," captured the frustration and pain of many black Southerners).

Despite their loss at the polls, the Freedom Democratic Party pressed ahead to the Atlantic City convention with 1,000 supporters to demand that they be recognized as the legitimate state delegation. Black Mississippians testified to the threats and violence they encountered while attempting to register. Fannie Lou Hamer gripped the convention with her tale of having been beaten in jail. She concluded, "All of this is on account we want to register, to become first-class citizens, and if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave?" (Burns, 32)

President Johnson interrupted the live broadcast of her testimony with an impromptu press conference, but this action could not stem support for the Freedom Democrats. In the end, the national party offered a compromise of two seats to be handpicked by the all-white regular Mississippi Democratic Party. The Freedom Democrats overwhelmingly rejected the compromise. They returned with increased understanding of the challenges they faced but determined to continue the struggle.

### *Violence and the Civil Rights Movement*

Even though the movement was based on nonviolence, it met with aggressive, confrontational, and often violent resistance. In 1955, Emmett Till was murdered; in 1963, Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP leader, was assassinated. Four little girls were killed in a bombing of their Birmingham church on a Sunday morning in 1963. In 1965, Malcolm X, outspoken leader of the Nation of Islam, was gunned down. Many more were killed in the wake of protest marches and skirmishes with local authorities. Almost sixty people were killed between 1961 and 1964 in white terrorist attacks.

The South was not the only place where racial violence erupted. Cities, often centers of urban neglect and oppressive poverty, housed many black residents. Despite its huge impact and great gains, the civil rights movement did not truly address the structural economic concerns affecting African Americans living in cities. Blacks in the urban centers were allowed to vote, yet often that vote did little to address poverty and urban blight. What was not equal was their access to decent housing and employment opportunities. Too many people were shut out of entry-level positions in professions, trades, and unions. For too many urban blacks, the promises of Northern migration proved empty and tainted by the same racism that so permeated the South. Tensions began to simmer, then overflow. The violence, death, and destruction that accompanied the rioting in Watts, Newark, Detroit, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., left fear, anger, and destruction that are still evident today.

• • •
*President Lyndon Johnson and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., commemorate the passage of the Voting Rights Act.*
National Museum of American History

### *Tangible Achievements*

The tangible gains of the civil rights movement were illustrated by the legislation that was passed in the 1960s: the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act in 1968. The leaders of the civil rights movement could take credit for pushing these issues to the forefront of America's conscience. Lyndon Johnson is credited with wielding his significant influence with Congress to help speed the passage of the legislation. While some argue that Johnson's motivations were his visions of a Great Society, others claim that his civil rights record was fueled by his need for domestic victories to offset U.S. involvement in the escalating Vietnam conflict.

The creation of affirmative action programs in the public and private sectors became a stepping stone in societal efforts to obtain racial equity. These new opportunities enabled many African Americans to continue their education through college and to obtain better jobs. Many blacks, especially those in the middle class, began to reap the economic benefits that came with increased black presence in business and government.

The activities of civil rights organizations created a new sensitivity to discrimination in American society. They stirred a sense of outrage at long-standing practices of violence and disenfranchisement of African Americans. They taught America that discrimination was not only a black issue; if discrimination were tolerated for some groups, it could easily be extended to others. Women, handicapped people, and other minority groups used the lessons and gains of the civil rights movement to extend the laws of equity to all sectors of American society.

### *Black Groups Outside the Mainstream*

The mainstream civil rights movement never included all African Americans. The Nation of Islam, for example, founded by Elijah Muhammad in Chicago, provided not just a protest movement but rather an alternative culture. The Nation's religious restrictions on diet and intoxicants, along with the Muslim codes of behavior, profoundly changed the lives of many African Americans such as Malcolm Little of Boston. Embracing Islam while in prison, he changed his name to Malcolm X; the letter X replaced the last names of many African American Muslims who rejected the imposition of European "slave names." The X also symbolized an acknowledgment that part of black culture was lost through the period of slavery, and the "X" represented that missing element of African culture. Elijah Muhammad's teachings became popular, particularly in the urban North.

The Nation of Islam's open rejection of many American values, and Malcolm X's open statements on the evil nature of whites, the "blue eyed devils," shocked and frightened the nation.

The media began to portray the Black Muslims as militant radicals. This contrast with the more palatable public image of Martin Luther King and the SCLC helped King, because officials much preferred negotiating with him than with Malcolm X.

In addition to the Muslims, other individuals or groups challenged the nonviolent middle-class notions of the civil rights movement. Stokely Carmichael's pronouncement of "Black Power!" during the Meredith march, for example, came to symbolize the more radical wing of the movement. The development of the ideology of Black Power highlighted the broad gamut of African American thought on self-identity and ethnic consciousness. It forced the more moderate positions represented by the SCLC and the NAACP and others to be more demanding and to extend the parameters of traditional civil rights concerns. Organizations like the Black Panthers, Cultural Nationalists, and followers of US were important because they helped to force issues of urban poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and economic self-determination into the minds of black and white Americans. These organizations did not use nonviolent strategies. Instead, they sought to advance the idea among African Americans that self-defense and self-determination were in their best interest in a hostile white world.

The Black Nationalist wing of the movement did not fare well with the U.S. government. The FBI organized a network of agents, provocateurs, and informants to dismantle the Nationalists. The Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) infiltrated and helped dismantle organizations by creating discord among members and discrediting the organizations in the public's eye. The highly publicized trials of activists like Angela Davis and Huey P. Newton characterized them to the public as violent threats to national security. Government pressure and violence combined with the successes and respectability of the moderates severely weakened black nationalist groups by the early 1970s.

### *The Final Analysis*

The civil rights movement used its own immediate social concerns as a springboard for an analysis of the larger setting. Although they may have differed on the paths of their analyses, many social sectors were articulating similar criticisms of the existing sociopolitical structure. Some scholars of the era believe that the threat represented in this broad challenge led to the government's covert and overt efforts to put a stop to protest, as shown with the existence of COINTELPRO.

The civil rights movement affected other movements, particularly as concern over the Vietnam War began to grip the nation. For the counterculture, the most ardent critics of U.S. society, the civil rights movement illustrated the hypocritical and exploitative nature of capitalist democracy. But many dissatisfied citizens and groups looked to experienced civil rights activists as models of social protest. Cries of black power and black solidarity soon influenced the La Raza or Chicano movement, helped inspire feminist notions that "Sisterhood Is Powerful," sparked the "Red Power" policies of the American Indian movement, and helped the leaders of the youth movement to realize the power of organization and dedication in a mass protest. Civil rights tactics such as marches and sit-ins became part of the cultural vernacular. Movement songs like "We Shall Overcome," which so characterized the charged mass meetings, were adapted to all types of protest causes.

Ultimately the civil rights movement was a success. It changed forever the tenor and tone of race relations in America. No longer could the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment guarantees of citizenship and suffrage be ignored. No longer would the legal manifestation of racism—laws that restrict accommodations on travel or housing based solely on race—be defended in courts of law or accepted as a reasonable norm. No longer would the murder or rape of blacks go unpunished in Southern courts of law.

As a result of the civil rights movement, an educated black middle class expanded and began to penetrate the halls of business, academia, and government. Today black mayors, judges, and congresswomen sit where none had sat before. Many schools and universities are now integrated, and elements of American culture that once smacked of racism are now eliminated or discredited. Truly a revolution occurred in post-World War II America.

Yet the civil rights movement has not led to the day when an individual is "not judged by the color of his skin but by the content of his character." While the middle class has benefited from changes such as affirmative action, many blacks are confined in urban ghettoes or in rural poverty that have been little changed by legislation like the Voting Rights Act. Many of the economic and structural causes of poverty and unemployment have not been addressed or have been sacrificed in light of other political priorities in post-civil rights movement America.

Clearly the civil rights movement was a revolution—but an unfinished one. Clearly

America has "overcome" much, but much remains to accomplish. We are, however, much closer to the day when all Americans can truly sing, "free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we are free at last." ★

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## *Questions to Consider*

1. What factors enabled the successes of the civil rights movement? What factors limited its effect on American life?

2. What role did the media play in the civil rights movement? If possible, view the PBS documentary series *Eyes on the Prize* to see archival footage. What are some contemporary uses of media by reform movements?

3. If the civil rights movement was successful in changing race relations in America, why does there still seem to be a gap in attitudes between blacks and whites? Monitor newspapers to identify and learn about race-related issues.

4. Find out about the Civil Rights Act of 1991. What were the issues, the organizations involved, tactics used, and outcomes?

# THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

*Why, after millions of years of harmonious co-existence, have the relationships between living things and their earthly surroundings begun to collapse? Where did the fabric of the ecosphere begin to unravel? How far will the process go? How can we stop it and restore the broken links?*



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**1962** Rachel Carson publishes *Silent Spring*, raising awareness of pesticide threats

**1963** Congress passes the first Clean Air Act. More comprehensive clean air acts follow in 1967, 1970, and 1990

**1964** Congress passes Wilderness Act

**1970** Earth Day, a major outpouring of student interest on college campuses, attracts media attention, spurs environmental politics.

Congress passes National Environmental Policy Act

**1972** Congress passes Clean Water Act, the Act built on the clean water acts of 1960 and 1965

**1973** Congress passes Endangered Species Act.

Oil crisis causes shortages and high prices

**1976** Congress passes the National Forest Management Act and the Federal Land Policy Management Act

*Personal Accounts*

## *Environmental Dangers Come Home*

Interviews with "Don", railroad conductor, and his wife, "Mary," early 1980s. *(Nelkin and Brown)*

***DON:*** *When the train goes into a terminal, the brakeman has to go out and throw the switch. The terminals are sprayed with dioxin. It's all over the rails, the roadbeds, and the switch handles. So when you pick up the bar to throw the switch, or get out to release the brakes, you're exposed. It's thick, oily, like a white cake all over the ground.*
*I knew that it was a weed killer, but not what chemical it was. I found out it was dioxin and that there was something wrong with it from some articles in the newspaper. I found out that dioxin could be linked to certain types of cancer. Being my daughter had cancer, I got interested.*

*The railroad insists that they haven't used that type of chemical for four years. But for the eleven years I've worked on the railroads, they've been using some type of weed sprayer. They have to, to keep the weeds off the roadbeds and the yards.*

*It's scary to think that I could have brought the stuff home on my pants or shoes or clothes, and maybe I threw them in a pile in the corner, and my daughter crawled over them. Or maybe I picked her up and it was on my coat. Something like that could have possibly caused her cancer. I don't know if it's a guilt feeling on my part, it's just a mixed-emotion-type feeling. It's hard to explain.*
*I hope that wasn't the reason. You read so much about it. It's a very hard feeling to describe.*

***MARY:*** *The feeling I have is that Don had dioxin in his system when our baby was conceived. You breathe that stuff, and it goes in through your pores. There's a genetic tie-in. I don't really want to pin her cancer on any one thing, yet there has to be one thing that caused it. I can't believe that there are that many different things. She didn't inherit it from somebody else, though they used that excuse when she died. When she was sick, there was never any discussion about where it came from. It's not a thing that anybody would usually think about it, unless you work in an asbestos factory or with radiation. We had never thought about dioxin.*
*A month and a half after she died, an article appeared in the local newspaper about the effects of dioxin and its use in weed killers on the railroad. We read the article and then that night we went back and read the crew books. Don has all this documentation because he had to write down where he worked every day. The dates coincide perfectly. Horrifyingly perfectly. The paper wrote it up in big block letters: THE RAILROAD AND DIOXIN. There it was, soft-cell sarcoma, the whole thing: it was written right there. Word for word, her diagnosis. That's when Don called the company.*

***DON:*** *When my daughter got cancer, she had to go for treatment every day for nine weeks in a row. From here back to the hospital is approximately 100 miles. And with the gas, parking, and tolls, it comes to almost $75 a week. That's a lot out of our paycheck. We applied to I forget how many agencies. The American Cancer Society gives you a grant of $50 a year. . . . You not only suffer the loss of the person that dies, but you suffer in the years ahead because you have to pay off the bills that were incurred at the time.*

***MARY:*** *When our daughter was dying, all we thought about was what was going on. The last thing that we were thinking of was litigation. When you talk about burying your child, compensation is the last thing you really have time to think about.*

***DON:*** *I'd like to see some type of change in the law. If a child under 18 causes any damage to somebody else's house up to $1,000, the parents are responsible for his actions, and they have to pay. If the government would only have some law like that with these chemical companies, then if something backfires or a disease occurs five or ten years down the road, they would be legally liable. I think that a*

1978 Love Canal, New York, disaster area declared; toxic pollutants detected in residential area.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a federal regulatory agency, is established.

1979 Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, nuclear reactor comes within one hour of meltdown.

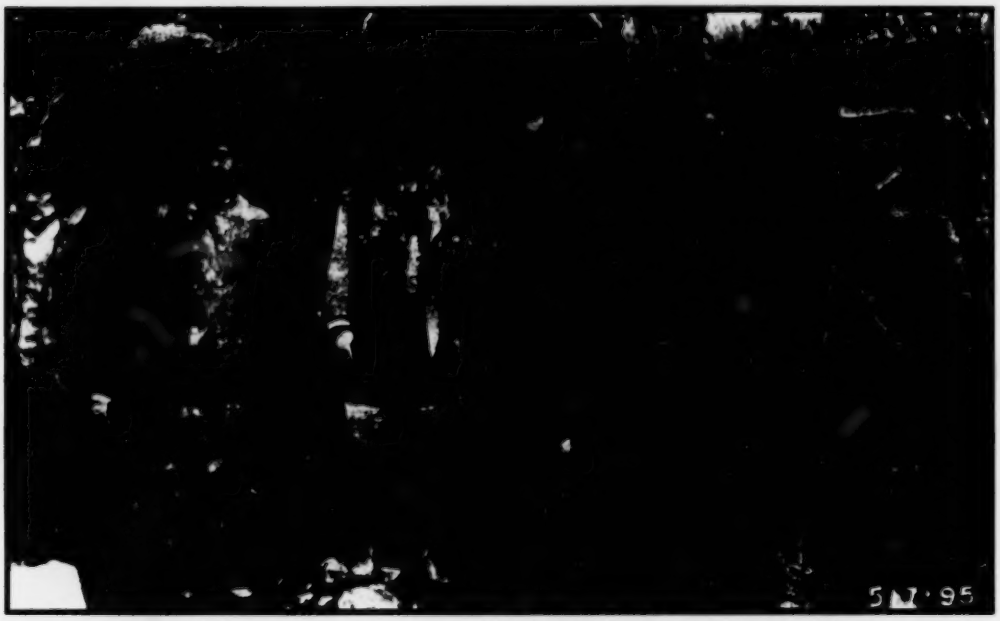
1986 Damaged nuclear reactor at Chernobyl, U.S.S.R., releases significant levels of radiation expected to scatter around the globe. Rumors ensue that contaminated dairy products have entered U.S. market.

1987 N.Y. barge loaded with 3,168 tons of trash illuminates solid waste problem. The barge travels 6,000 miles to five states and three foreign countries in search of a dump site before returning unsuccessfully to New York.

1988 Medical waste and sewage wash ashore on recreational beaches along Eastern seaboard.

1989 Exxon Valdez becomes largest oil tanker spill in U.S. history, leaking approximately one quarter million barrels of crude oil.

1990 Earth Day, twentieth anniversary national celebration.



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*Pioneers of conservation: Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and John Muir stand in the center of this grouping under a giant Redwood. Pinchot is the tallest figure; the heavily bearded Muir stands in front of him to the right of Roosevelt.*

National Agricultural Library, Forest Service Photo Collection

*lot of manufacturers would think twice before dumping these new chemicals or drugs on the market, if they were legally bound and responsible for anything that could happen down the road. . . .*

*Maybe we have to take things into our own hands. If there were only a way that the people directly affected could decide what is used on the job. Ultimately we're the ones who are going to be exposed, not the supervisor or the superintendent who's sitting up on the third floor in his office somewhere. It's the union members, the train personnel, or the nonoperating personnel, the track workers, the signalmen. They should be the ones ultimately who decide their own fate.*

## *The Roots of Environmentalism*

Americans' emotional investment in nature is as old as the republic itself—the "new Eden" of unspoiled natural wealth fired the imaginations of explorers and settlers, writers and artists, and then developers and industrialists for more than a hundred years. Later, in the mid-twentieth century, when human dominance of the landscape was nearly complete, the modern environmental movement arose to challenge the ways in which land, water, air, and wildlife were being used—and to demand change for the protection of both natural and human resources. As the century draws to a close, the environmental movement appears to have achieved only partial success. The story of the modern environmental movement illustrates both the power and the limitations of political protest at this time in American history.

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# THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

**Conservation**

★ Conservation of the natural environment first became a national social issue in the late nineteenth century. At that time, the meaning of conservation was different than it is today. Early conservationism reflected the expansionist spirit of the day: government guided industry in its use of resources but encouraged their exploitation. The administration of President Theodore Roosevelt wanted a strong federal system for planned, efficient control of natural resource development.

**Preservation**

★ Alongside the conservationists were those who advocated the preservation of natural resources in their original state for the greater enjoyment of humankind. This coincided with new national attitudes on recreation, as well as the concern that urban industrial workers be provided with an escape in a relaxing environment from the tensions of modern life.

There were two ideologies about why nature should be preserved. The [Theodore] Roosevelt administration's policies stressed recreation such as hunting and fishing. They created the first National Parks and the Fisheries and Wildlife Bureau. The other ideology, known as naturalism, emphasized the appreciation of nature in its pristine state as a place for reflection and spiritual discovery. Organizations such as the Sierra Club (1892), the National Audubon Society (1905), the National Parks and Conservation Association (1919), and the Izaak Walton League (1922) were founded to promote these interests. These groups were small but dedicated.

There was some organized political activity on behalf of the environment as early as 1901 when the Sierra Club, under the leadership of its charismatic founder John Muir, unsuccessfully opposed the building of a dam in Yosemite National Park. Failure discouraged further such efforts until the 1950s.

## *Modern Players in the Movement*

**Federal Government**

★ Some of the first ecological problems to gain widespread attention were considered "public health" problems at the time. As early as the turn of the century, people were worried that pollution of the drinking water supply by human and industrial sewage being dumped untreated into rivers and streams would cause disease. Handling this problem led to the passage of the first federal environmental legislation in 1948, called the Water Pollution Control Act, which involved both local and federal action. Generally, the federal government saw pollution control as a state and local issue for many years. Not until December 2, 1970 was a federal environmental regulatory agency, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), established to enforce the many new environmental laws then being passed by Congress.

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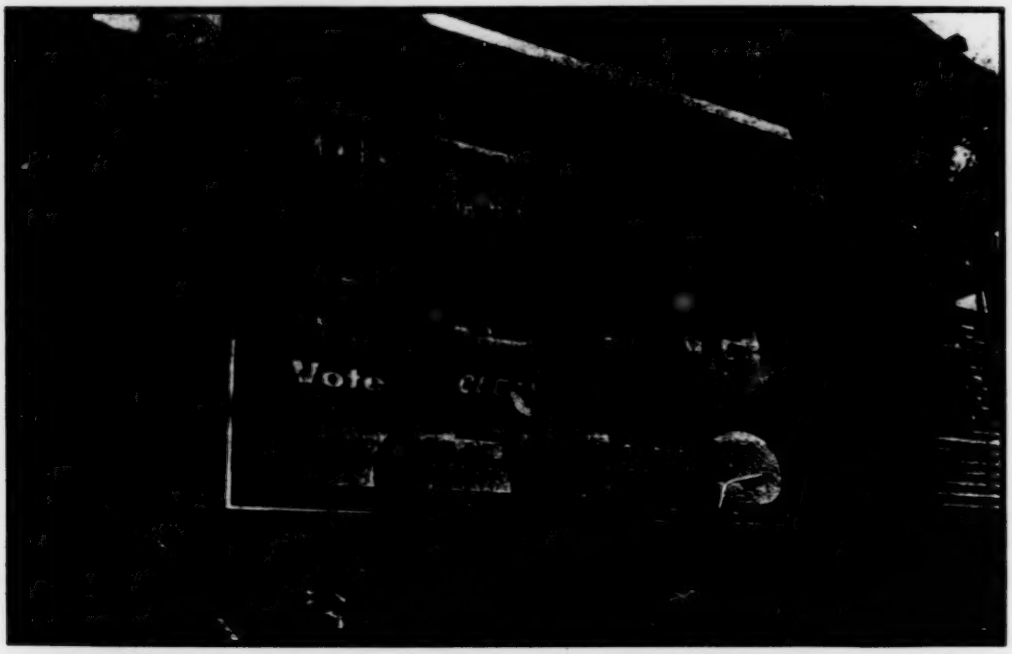
*Air and water pollution were the first issues of the modern environmental movement.*

Library of Congress



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# THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

**Scientific Community**

★ An important player in the development of public consciousness about environmental problems was the scientific community. The government had employed scientists of many political persuasions in the development of the atomic weapons that decimated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. After World War II, some of these scientists began to raise public concern about the control of atomic technology by the military. Although many of their concerns were silenced in the political and nationalistic tide of McCarthy anti-Communism in the 1950s, these scientists helped create awareness that technology had great destructive power.

Less political but equally important scientific work in the 1940s and 1950s began to focus on ecosystems. The idea of interrelationships, that one action, like damming a river, has myriad consequences for the plants and animals in the surrounding areas, was not the way most people had previously seen nature.

Scientists also did the real work of discovering and proving that chemicals, processes, and activities previously taken for granted had damaging effects. Scientific reports linking disease (usually cancers) to chemicals used in agriculture, food processing, gardening, manufacturing, and many other activities that touch the lives of most citizens were published and publicized with alarming regularity. People greeted these reports with mixtures of scorn, fear, and anger. Science thus laid the groundwork for new perceptions of nature *and* technology. This foundation was essential to generating social awareness, then action, on behalf of the environment.

**Counterculture Groups**

★ Another important influence on the development of the environmental movement came from the counterculture movements of the late 1950s and the 1960s. Young people in particular blamed the "Establishment," specifically, government and big business, for creating obstacles to global harmony. The counterculture challenged almost everything about American society: the war in Vietnam, how schools were run and what was being taught in them, the tenets of religious belief, what marriage should be, alcohol's being legal while drugs thought to be "mind-expanding" and harmless were illegal, women's roles, the music and other art forms of the older generation, and more.

The fundamental change in American society brought about in part by the counterculture was a new willingness to challenge all established authority—including government and big business. While these were seen as promoting the public good during the Second World War, for example, they were now blamed for starting and continuing the Vietnam War.

The counterculture, largely made up of young, white, and middle-class members, profoundly affected public consciousness partly because of its sheer numbers but also because of its economic power. Of course, the massive social changes begun in the 1960s are not attributable solely to the middle-class youth movement. The civil rights movement began in the rural South, not on college campuses, for example, although many students actively supported it. But young people were in the forefront of a new environmentalism that developed in the 1960s and 1970s. In these years environmental organizations' membership rolls mushroomed: they gained popular support from new perceptions and attitudes about the environment, government, and business.

**The Media**

★ Finally, the media had enormous influence on growing environmentalism. It was one thing to read that baby seals were being hunted, or birds being poisoned by insecticides, or rivers being on fire from industrial waste, another to see them on the evening news. By the 1970s, both the news organizations and environmental organizations were reporting dangers, abuses, and catastrophes affecting the land and its inhabitants, animal and human.

## *Environmental Organizations*

Roused by what they saw on the news or sometimes experienced in their own lives, many Americans wanted to take action to protect the environment. Like countless other aggrieved citizens before them, they organized. The 1960s saw the growth of powerful organizations that would begin to draw large memberships and gain the power to determine or change government and business activity in areas affecting the environment. Some of the organizations, like the Sierra Club, had existed since the turn of the century; others, like the National Resources Defense Council, which was formed to file lawsuits against EPA and other agencies, met new needs of modern, litigation-oriented American society.

Memberships and financial support doubled, quadrupled. At present a powerful environmental

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# THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

*Protesters at rally denouncing a New York State plan to resettle evacuated Love Canal. Homes were built on top of an illegal hazardous waste site that caused serious health problems for former residents.*

Copyright Ava Long/ Greenpeace 1990

establishment represents millions of people. The major organizations include the Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, Audubon Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, Isaak Walton League, Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Defense Fund, National Parks and Conservation Association, and the Environmental Policy Institute.

Unlike other social movements, the environmental movement does not have one charismatic leader. Retaining their importance to the movement are scientists and experts like Barry Commoner and Paul Erlich, who often are distinguished spokesmen for organizations. Television and movie stars have also given their time, financial support, and media access to the movement.

Environmental organizations have effected social change on a large scale: the Wilderness Act of 1964, which prohibited some types of development from some of the nation's most important natural resources, the Clean Air and Water acts, and many other laws and regulations exist because of both their lobbying arms and their mobilization of massive public support. They have also been powerful public educators. But while some percentage of membership is activist—willing to ring doorbells, conduct letter-writing campaigns, or attend protests or rallies, many card-carrying environmentalists have done little more than donate $25 to an organization.

One aspect of the movement that makes large-scale activism difficult to create and sustain is the diversity, complexity, and sheer number of environmental issues, which range from population growth and overdevelopment to wildlife and wilderness preservation to toxics and waste management. Another problem is that regional economic interests compete with environmental initiatives. Compromising some environmental objectives to preserve jobs or whole industries often seems necessary, but these difficult negotiations are often handled by legislators, lawyers, and experts, not citizen activists. Grassroots protest often occurs only when a local crisis or environmental challenge erupts. When residents of the Love Canal neighborhood of Niagara Falls, New York, for example, discovered that they were sick and dying because a chemical company had dumped toxic wastes under their homes and playgrounds, they actively organized to demand redress from state and local government.

## *Individual Actions*

Even the major environmental organizations have recognized that collective action alone cannot solve the array of environmental problems and issues affecting the nation. Collective activities like marches could not hope to include more than a small percentage of a community's population.

Perhaps the most powerful tool yet devised by the environmentalists is "green consumerism." Largely a result of two decades of education and consciousness-raising, consumers are now selecting purchases based on the environmental record of the producer. Environmental organizations conduct product research and publish their findings, but the consumer—the individual—takes action by choosing to buy or not buy. This trend has been instrumental in creating a new focus of marketing, and is beginning to affect actual business operations.

An important tactic in promoting individual environmentalism has been enacting legislation to force or facilitate compliance. In some instances, such as endangered species or wildlife preservation laws, environmentalists had to confront powerful business interests and some opposition from segments of the public as well

Legislation of this kind, which protects nature not to save money or promote some other economic imperative, shows national commitment to goals other than economic development. Such legislation affects not only corporations and businesses, as, for example, when logging is prohibited to save endangered species, but also individuals who come to understand that law-abiding citizens have environmental responsibilities.

Organizations and legislation have affected and shaped individual actions but they nonetheless have allowed people to be active environmentalists without ever joining an organization or attending a rally. While this general lack of activism slows the progress of change it makes the environmental movement a true process of cultural change in the United States. By the 1990s, the furs, large cars, and conspicuous consumption once associated with living well are instead often objects of public scorn.

### *Environmentalism Summary*

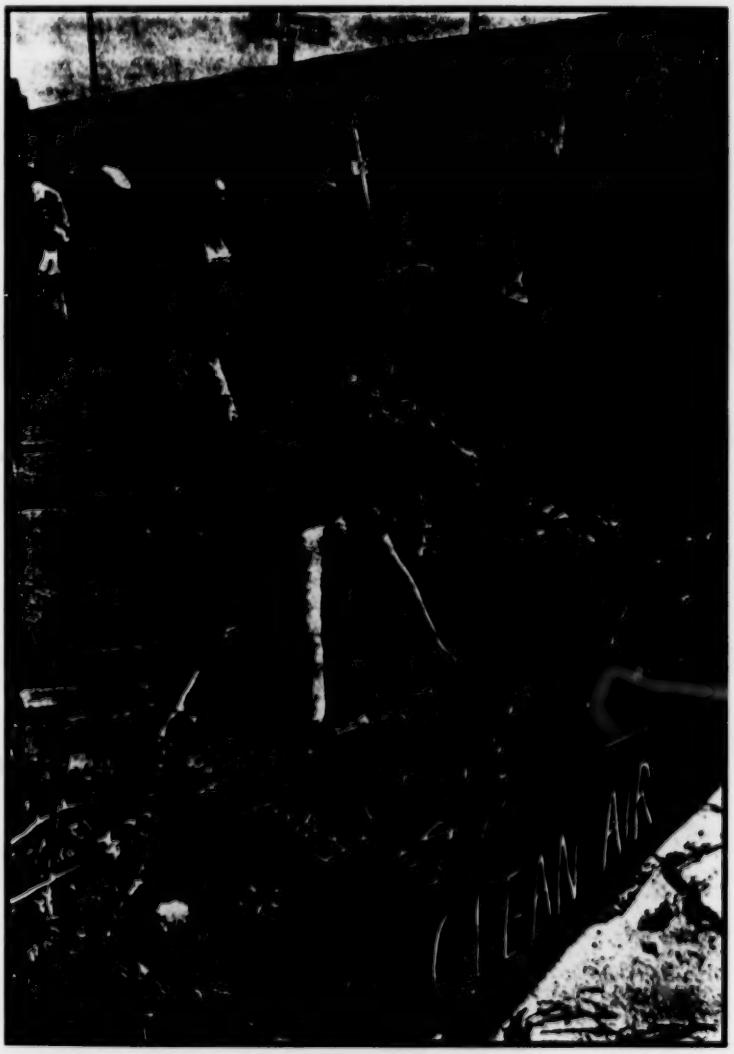
**Issues**

★ The issues publicized in the 1960s fell into the three broad categories that characterize modern environmentalism: pollution and toxic waste, resource depletion (including the endangerment of various animal species), and population growth. Widespread consensus on the importance of these issues gave the movement its mass appeal. The diversity of possible solutions made this movement unlike any other in the wide variety of articulations it included, delineated by their target and strategies. The major targets were individuals, business, and government; the strategies were as varied as the imaginations of the activists.

**Tactics**

★ The environmental movement is so massive that it has probably used, at one time or another, every protesting tactic known from earlier political protests: passive resistance, marches, boycotts, voluntary arrests, and so on. Major emphases in the movement, however, have been litigation and lobbying. Especially during the Reagan administration, with its policy of less government regulation of private industry, lobbying took on such importance to the environmental movement that its organizations have become institutions of the Washington political scene. Lobbying organizations employed professional staffs and relied on membership contributions to meet operating expenses and generate publicity on specific issues.

The filing of lawsuits had great importance in



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*Protest at the front gate of a hazardous waste dump in California. Protesters blocked entry with symbolic caskets representing the death of the environment and citizens.*

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# THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

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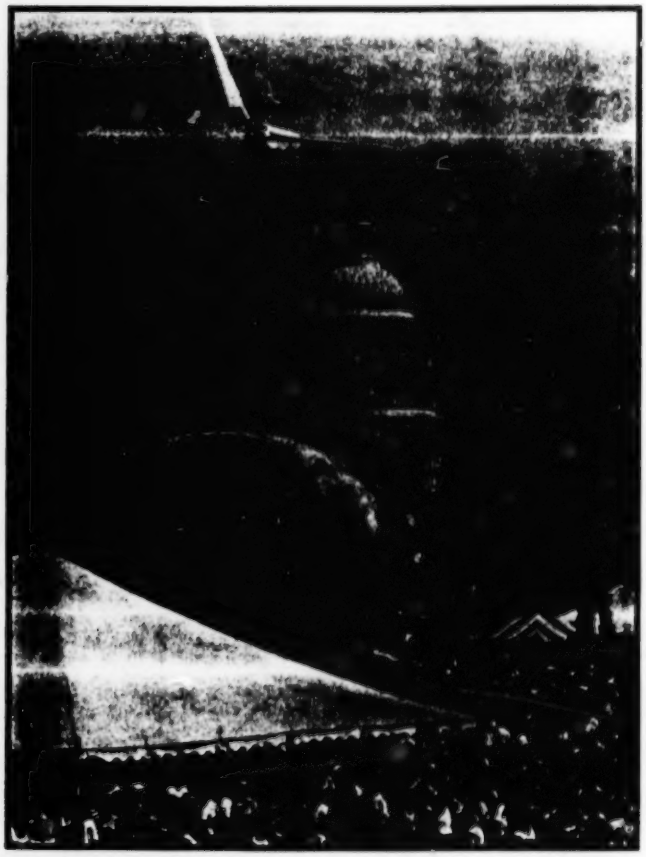

*Earth Day 1990 in Washington, D.C.*

National Museum of American History

achieving goals of the movement. Organizations filed lawsuits against corporations for breaking laws and suits against the government for not enforcing laws. Lawyers obtained injunctions to stop things from being torn down or from being built.

**Judging the Movement**

★ In some ways the environmental movement has been more successful than any previous form of protest. There are laws, regulations, watchdog agencies, volunteer organizations, courses of study from the elementary to college level—whose purpose is the understanding of, appreciation for, and protection of the environment. Public attitudes *have* changed, and polls show generalized support for [illegible] protection.

Yet a vociferous element of the environmental movement exists that claims none of this activity has been enough to stop what they see as the unrelenting destruction of the planet. Groups like Earth First!, the Sea Shepherds, and Animal Liberation see none of the changes as sufficient and the major environmental organizations as mainstream and conservative, bound by their very nature to compromise. The radical groups believe in direct action, not political compromise: they drive spikes into trees or sit in them to keep them from being cut down; they may damage property, camp out in hunting areas to make the hunting impossible, and use other sometimes violent actions to achieve their ends.

Another criticism of the environmental movement is that it has led to surprisingly close relationships between environmentalist organizations and businesses. Contributions to environmental groups help the public image of businesses while supporting organizational activities. Many environmentalists refuse direct contributions from polluters, but other groups rely on grants and donations for their survival. A typical business/environmentalist collaboration is the promotion of environmental credit cards providing for a percentage of all purchases to environmental organizations. Ironically, credit cards promote the very consumerism that contributes to waste and pollution.

In most protest movements, including the environmental movement, one function of the radicals is to make the mainstream's demands seem moderate and therefore acceptable. Another function of radical environmentalists seems to be to create dramatic scenes and confrontations that attract media coverage and therefore draw public attention to issues. On the other hand, the continual shifting of attention from one issue to another can dilute public response or make environmental problems seem too numerous to conquer. In general, radical environmental groups have been [illegible] tired, or unable to grow.

The most successful of the radical groups, however, has become large, enduring, and continues to grow in the United States and other countries. Greenpeace, founded in Vancouver in 1969 by a small group including Sierra Club members and activists of other causes, aimed to protest the testing of nuclear weapons by the United States in the Aleutian Islands. Members

sailed their rented boat, which they renamed *Greenpeace*, to the test site to try to stop the detonation.

Greenpeace gained worldwide media attention, perhaps none as exciting as films and photographs of antiwhaling activists in little rubber dinghies amid Soviet whaling ships and the huge whales themselves. By mail solicitation and door-to-door fundraising, Greenpeace has become the largest environmental organization in the world, with two million U.S. members, half the world's total. Greenpeace does not consider itself mainstream although it now has a lobbying arm, many offices, and a paid staff. It remains committed to direct action and continues to support local efforts to address local problems. But radicals like Earth First! see all organizations as co-opted, Greenpeace included.

Another problem is that while individual, local, and collective action brought to bear on powerful institutions like the government and major corporations would seem to be sufficient to solve most problems, environmental issues are global, not confined only to the United States. The international structure of Greenpeace addresses this problem, but a means to successfully resolving international issues is not yet clear and remains a challenge for the movement. ★

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## *Questions to Consider*

1. Define the differences between the conservation movement and the environmental movement, exploring the ultimate goals of each movement.

2. Why do individuals and institutions oppose some environmental aims? Find out about past or current environmental controversies in your state or region and discuss the arguments of both (or all) sides of the issues. Or, focus on a recently passed environmental law or regulation: identify the bill's proponents and opponents; whether compromises were made by committees; and the influence of lobbyists and citizen organizations.

3. Earth Day was held in 1970 and 1990. Research contemporary press accounts of each event. Is Earth Day a protest or a celebration? What was the origin or catalyst for each event? Who were the organizations and individuals involved? Which issues dominated? Which event had more media coverage? How many people participated in each event? What were the outcomes of each event?

4. What role do the media play in the environmental movement? Compare the environmental movement's media tactics with those used by the civil rights movement.

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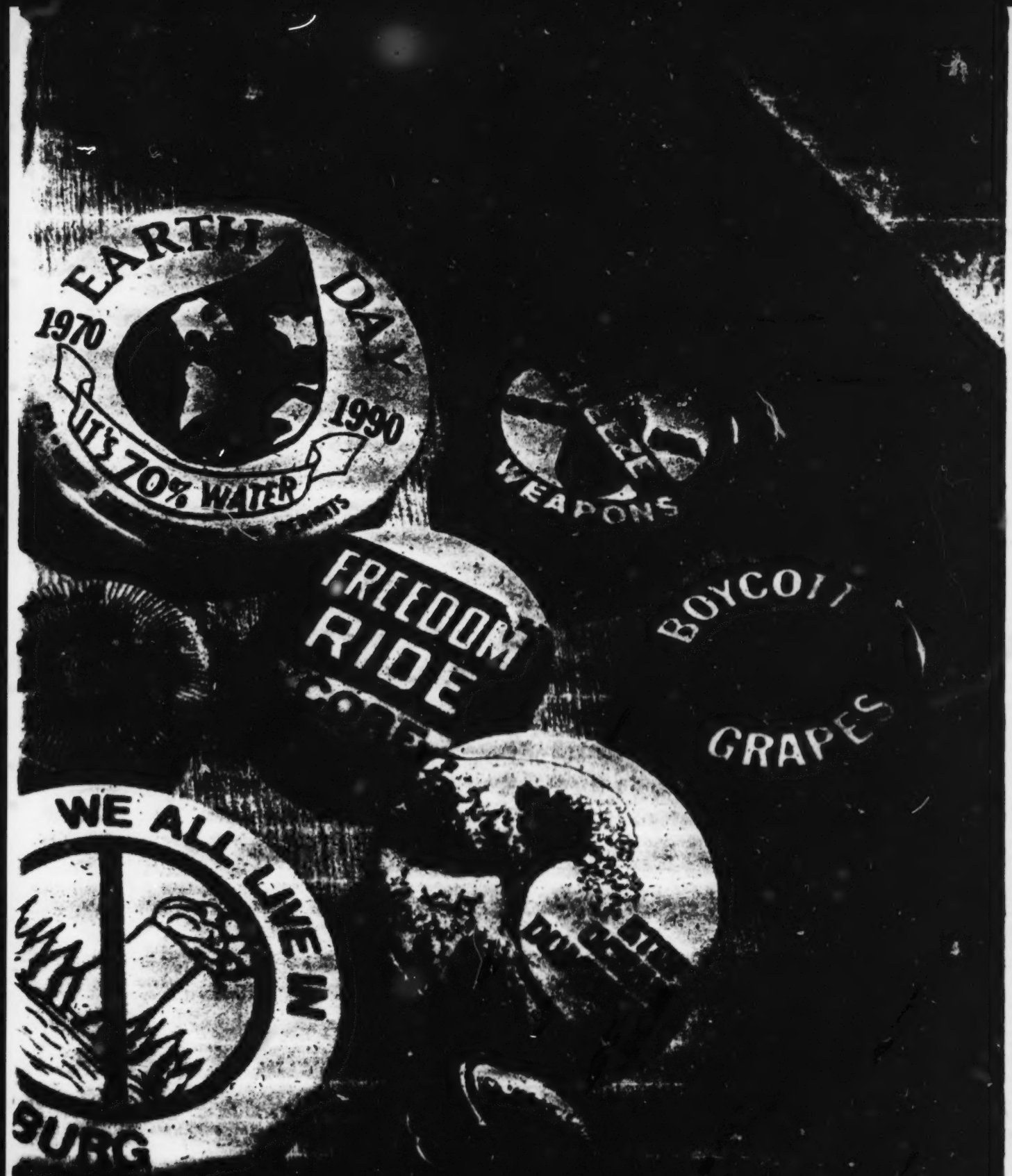




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